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Dr M: No help for SAR (HL)

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KAMPAR, Sun. - Government assistance, including funding, will no longer be channelled to Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR) as such schools breed anti-Government sentiment, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He, however, said the Government had no plan to ban the schools, which would be allowed to continue but without the Government's assistance or support.

He said the Government refused to assist in "spoiling the future" of the children by helping such schools to continue.

"If they want to blight the future of the children we cannot stop them, but we are not going to help them. Those educated at SAR will grow up hating everything, including the Government. They cannot work and are not qualified to do anything else."

Speaking after performing the ground-breaking of Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman's main campus near here, Dr Mahathir said SAR, including the primary and secondary schools, were not religious schools per se but "political indoctrination institutions".

He said SAR students were very anti-Government, and this was something that had to be taught.

"It is not religion that is being taught, as religion promotes Muslim brotherhood, but they reject this," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government was relocating more than 70,000 students from the "people's religious schools" to Government schools.

There are more than 500 SAR nationwide with 126,000 students. Some students have been relocated, while some parents, on their own accord, have moved their children to national schools.

Students have until Feb 6 to move out of SAR.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would ensure that national schools provided adequate religious education, and was further improving the system.

He added that the curriculum for religious studies was adequate and SAR were no longer necessary.

"Maybe during British rule we needed them because the British never paid attention to religion. That was how the pondok system of education and the tok guru came into being.

"But now the Government is spending money on building schools and ensuring that religious education is available, so why can't the children go to Government schools?

"We don't need SAR," he said, adding that the teachers in the schools were not qualified and were only interested in making money.

Asked whether the Government would consider taking over the administration of such schools, Dr Mahathir said there was no point as proper schools would have to be set up again and that would cost a lot of money.

On talks that non-governmental organisations had formed bodies to save SAR and that they were planning to meet the Sultans in several States to discuss the matter, the Prime Minister said: "They can bring it up to the Sultans if they want to, but the Government will have to inform the Sultans the real situation on the ground ... (these are) political schools," he added.